

April 2022

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# MAKING WAVES

By Jordan Benshop

ADOBE STOCK

**Land ‘N’ Sea Distributing and Keller Marine & RV spotlight the current state of the marine industry, what hybrid distribution entails and how dealers can “set sail” both on the water and on land.**

**RV**ing is only one slice of the red-hot outdoor recreation pie – and some distributors, plus their dealers, are finding success in spaces where they can cool down (literally).

The marine market, much like RV, started out as a general concept – buy a boat and hit the water. But as time and consumer interests evolved over time, so has the industry itself.

## Surf vs. Turf

When it comes to selling boats and RVs, one thing is certain – money *does* buy happiness. These markets don’t rely on product necessity, but rather the availability of consumers’ discretionary income. While the notion has long been both industries’ greatest measure of success, another factor has become just as essential – if not more – than consumers’ extra cash.

“That’s discretionary time,” says Mike Keller, president of Keller Marine & RV, which started its marine business in 1958 and joined the RV industry roughly 10 years later. “If income is good, gas prices are good and interest rates are good, we think it’ll be a great year. But what we saw through COVID was buyers with time – and nobody had a great measure of that.”

In the marine industry especially, time could be regarded as a currency. Keller says he tells dealers to forget hour meters on boats. If a customer looks at their per-hour usage one year, they’ll think it’s too expensive and sell it the next, he says.

“If you ever find a way to get people more time, you’ll get more sales,” he says of dealers. “(Consumers) don’t feel good about spending the money when they don’t get to use it – and people with money usually don’t have time.”

While the idea affects both marine and RV, the latter is more flexible. Consumers get more use out of an RV than just camping. For instance, a buyer isn’t taking their boat to a NASCAR race.



KELLER MARINE & RV PHOTOS COURTESY OF KELLER, LAND 'N' SEA  
FILE PHOTOS FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR'S 2016 DEALER SHOW.

**The Keller Marine & RV family stands in front of the company’s building. Pictured from left to right are: Mike Keller, president; Lori Morrow, director of marketing; and Michael T. Keller, director of sales.**





Bio-Kleen's Tracy Lynn Kowalski (behind booth) and Tim Kowalski (in yellow shirt) chat with dealers at the Keller Marine & RV show. Bio-Kleen is one of a number of suppliers that sell both RV and marine products at the Keller show.



A display at Keller Marine & RV's dealer show showcases a variety of marine product offerings.



"Boating is just boating – that's it. But an RV enables you to go boating," Keller explains. "An RV is a means to an end, but a boat is an end to itself."

Over at Land 'N' Sea Distributing (LNS), which got its start in the marine market and later expanded into the RV industry, time also played an important factor in industry differences.

"Boating is normally a day sport, and RVing is normally a weekend, week or full-time sport," says Tony Paigo, sales director of RV at LNS. "There are very little differences (between markets). RVing is a longer event, but they are otherwise similar industries."

In the early '90s and 2000s, Keller says one circumstance shifted the way consumers, and therefore distributors and dealers, viewed the two recreation markets: The internet.

"Leisure time blew up and fragmented," Keller says. "As that started, the marine slice got slivered in the recreational pie. But RVing is enabling the whole pie."

The internet's explosion meant more people with like interests could gather without being in close proximity. The RV lent itself to that, he says.

"You could be in Denver one month and California the next. It let people get together temporarily and then go back to where they live," Keller says. "More subgroups were happening, and those groups got together in RVs a lot."

However, when it comes to both industries, Land 'N' Sea notes similarities – such as being recreational, seasonal and geared toward making memories in the great outdoors – have made the distributor proud to invest its service model in supplying both markets.

### Making the 'Sail'

In the RV marketplace today, Keller notes that most growth comes from the fact that more RVs are being sold than ever before. The RV Industry Association said more than 600,000 units were





**Dometic team members converse with dealers and take orders during a Land ‘N’ Sea show. Dometic is one of several suppliers at Land ‘N’ Sea shows that serve both RV and boat dealers.**

shipped in 2021, with another 600,000 projected to be shipped in 2022 – compared to roughly 200,000 boats in the marine market. However, disregarding numbers, Keller says the RV industry can learn a thing or two from boating.

“When I sell you an RV, if I don’t want buyer remorse, I should get inside your head and understand the desired experience,” he says.

If an RV customer wants office space for remote work, Keller says he’ll focus on ideal packages – a unit with three tables and onboard Wi-Fi, for example. Like vacation planning, when travelers book daily excursion packages before the trip, Keller says he sees the same opportunity with RVs. Dealers need to get inside the customer’s head and sell an experience – not an RV. It’s no longer good enough to say, “here’s an RV, hope you like it,” he says.

“Boating saw that happen 25 years ago. People used to buy a boat – now they buy a wakeboard boat, pontoon or bass boat. The purchase is specifically tied to the activity,” Keller says. “That’s why the runabout (general boat) business is nothing.

“RV didn’t make that jump like marine did then,” he adds. “The more the dealer gets involved in the experience, and accessorizes the RV to do that, the more successful that dealer is with accessories and selling RVs.”

As a distributor, Keller says his staff focuses on training RV dealers to sell experiences – which is why the company’s accessory business is booming.

“We feel like if you buy every accessory on the coach before you drive off the lot, you win, Mr. Dealer,” Keller says. “If I wait for them to come back, it’s probably not successful. If I wait for them to buy a part on Amazon, it’s not successful.

“That’s us. That’s where Keller’s mind is and it’s something we learned from the marine business. They’ve been doing it that way for years.”

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**Keller Marine & RV's warehouse in Port Trevorton, Pa., (pictured above and directly below) carries about 25,000 RV and marine parts.**



**Land 'N' Sea said its 2016 show attracted about 300 exhibitors. The distributor has added many more marine and RV suppliers since that time.**

## Finding Middle Ground

When it comes to serving both industries, LNS says its strong established relationships with suppliers on both sides have put the company in a unique position to capitalize dealer advantages. The distributor has more than 150 sales representatives spanning both markets.

"As it relates to suppliers, there's a significant overlap," says Ken Ferleger, LNS vice president of sales. "At LNS, we are leveraging the core capabilities of wholesale distribution to provide same-day or next-day service."

Crossover regarding consumers also is apparent.

"What I see with boaters is, they usually have Class C motorhomes," Keller says. "It depends on the area of the country you're in."

Keller Marine & RV is headquartered in Port Trevorton, Pa., where he says "pickup truck campers" – or slide-ins – are common for bass fishers.

"A bass guy going to a tournament can put a slide-in inside the truck and stay overnight at the water," Keller says. "If you have a travel trailer, you can't pull a boat behind it."

Park model RVs, which are more permanent, are often seen parked along lakes and places with water access, he says, because people can leave their camper and bring the boat up during season. The park model business expanded with boating, Keller says, also because boating has more limitations – such as those made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"There are places where you can't build to the edge of the water, you can only put temporary things there," Keller says. "RVs work well for that – you can move in and out based on high water."

## A Change in the Winds

As with all industries, especially industrial, market shifts were inevitable following the COVID-19 pandemic. The lifestyle change caused families to spend more time on safer activities, with boating and RVing being a preferred way to enjoy family time, says Aimee Vera, director of marketing and e-commerce at LNS.

On one hand, LNS says the marine marketplace saw a consolidation of larger dealers at the manufacturing and dealer level.

"Demographics of boaters have changed dramatically," adds Ferleger. "It's recreation where all families are more involved, there's more diversity and the average age of boaters is becoming younger and younger."

Compared to the RV industry, Keller says he considers the boating demographic to have always been younger on average.

"Demographics became very similar (in the two industries) over the last part of my career compared to the beginning. You can easily see the same person now in both markets, and you wouldn't have seen that in the early days," Keller says. "Demo-



*“Demographics of boaters have changed dramatically. ... There’s more diversity and the average age of boaters is becoming younger and younger.”*

**– Ken Ferleger, LNS vice president of sales**

graphics in RV really came down – it used to just be retired people.

“When I was growing up, marine was a whole lot different than RV. At the Chicago Boat Show, you’d see three-quarter naked bikini models laying on boats. That’s not OK now – it’s very different,” Keller says.

Consumer mindsets are very different, too. What works for one buyer may not work for the next, he says.

“In comes the COVID consumer, a person so different from what I call ‘Tim the Toolman Taylor’ – an RVer who wanted interaction,” Keller says. “Now, people don’t want to see anybody. They don’t want social interaction – that’s why they’re RVing and over there in the world of boondocking and solar power. They’re up to speed on ideas through social media.”

New consumer mindsets mean emerging trends within both markets. Electric vehicles are becoming a hot topic in RV, but the marine industry has been ahead of that trend for “a long time.”

“There’s been big electric outboards for a while, with high horsepower. And they’re going to get bigger,” Keller says.

The marine industry was blessed with the “halo effect,” he adds. If someone says they own a yacht, that automatically comes with a high-profile reputation. Not so much for RV, he says.

“Marine just kind of lived off the reputation and didn’t do a

very good job of cultivating that,” Keller says. “RV struggled with reputation, but Go RVing and other things have done more to change its perception in the industry. That’s helping bring in the younger demographic.”

### **Tackling Supply Woes**

What is not uncommon to hear: Both industries continue to see supply chain challenges, Ferleger says.

“In spite of those challenges, we continue to invest heavily in inventory to supply our dealers with the high-quality service levels that they’re used to,” he adds.

What is often considered an industry issue is really more of a vendor hurdle.

“Many suppliers are now in both (markets) – not just RV or marine,” Keller says. “It’s such an easy business to be good at right now, but people shouldn’t get complacent.”

While most American companies would love to see more U.S. production amid supply chain hiccups, that’s not necessarily the problem, he says.

“It’s not U.S. labor costs – it’s U.S. labor. Its nonexistent,” Keller says. “We could have about 20 more workers than we have right now, and we’re just under 100.”

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**Dealers stream into the Land 'N' Sea show floor in Las Vegas in this file photo from 2016. The distributor says it stocks 80,000 marine and RV parts.**



**Land 'N' Sea President Michael F. Connors and Director of Marketing Aimee Vera are pictured at the distributor's 2016 show in Las Vegas, where they reported they were very happy with both the exhibitor and the attendee turnout.**



**Dealers crowd the hallway, preparing to enter the Land 'N' Sea show floor during the distributor's 2016 show in Las Vegas.**

Attracting qualified talent has become a daunting task for many industries, but especially at the technician level for RV and marine. Being a place people want to work is the goal, Keller says.

"It's a free agency market, and I don't mind paying more if you show me something more. You have to pay the higher prices to attract good workers and good people. If you don't – good luck," he says.

He says another factor impacting the flow in both industries is product proliferation. In RV, he notes roughly 50 different city water fills on his shelves – yet they all have the same use.

"The reason that matters is because we don't have enough volume to have all these different parts," Keller says. "A dealer is trying to keep a tech on a flat rate to keep them busy, but they never have the part in stock. ... It creates longer lead times."

He adds that an industry-wide thought similar to auto practices might help – such as having the same water fill on all of one manufacturer's units, which helps dealers keep parts in stock.

"I surveyed my own dealers one time with the question: 'How many days does it take on average to get a warranty authorization from your OEM?,' " Keller says. "The best answer was five, the worst was 10. So, if you want to take RECT down – instant warranty authorizations."

The RV world has a different mentality at the OE level compared to marine, which has fewer players with more power. While the same is true of RV, there are more brands/plants under the major OEs.

"If you look at any industrial organization, the higher the barrier to entry is, the higher the barrier to exit. Larger players mean less likely competition, which changes the marketplace dynamics," Keller says. "Marine has a higher barrier to entry/exit than RV."

Regarding dealers, there's much less middle-sized players in marine, he adds.

"Any time a market matures, it forces players to get either big or small," Keller says. "That's just part of natural selection in a more mature market."

### **Direction for Dealers**

RV dealers with an eye on the marine market should be mindful of the industry's segments. The easiest path by far, Keller says, is the pontoon boat market.

"When you go into blue water (like yachts), it's a whole different game. If you're going to be 40 miles offshore, you don't want anything to break. We overbuild for that," he says.

Many RV components are comparatively lower level, Keller says, similar to pontoons.

"If you're an RV dealer thinking about getting into the marine market, get into pontoons – don't try to get into blue water. That market has way different set of circumstances," he adds.

"You'll find a way more inland approach to product in the Keller marine catalog because it crosses with RV."

On the other hand, LNS is a broader marine offering distributor, getting its start in blue water. The company distributes to every market segment across marine and RV.



*“Demographics became very similar (in the RV and marine industries) over the last part of my career compared to the beginning. You can easily see the same person now in both markets ...”*

**– Mike Keller, president, Keller Marine & RV**

“Inland boating is generally smaller vessels – coastal and blue water boating are larger that can be equipped for overnight stays,” Ferleger says. “In addition to the corrosive effects of salt water and its effect on a boat’s operating systems, those boats ... can sustain weekend-plus stays.”

There are different strategies in maintenance, sales and usage between segments, Ferleger adds.

However, for dealers seeking additional revenue streams in the shop, LNS says boats and RVs run with the same plumbing concepts at their cores.

Keller’s advice to dealers: “Take on the right OE product if you’re going to do it. If you’re going to just (retail) crossover accessories, that’s a tough sale.

“But the future of the industry is about accessorizing that new vehicle. Don’t wait for them to stumble back into your dealership later,” he adds.

#### **It’s Showtime!**

While the busy summer season is just around the corner, the marine frenzy takes place during showtime. Keller held its distributor show last November in Hershey, Pa.

“Now we’re trying to ship the frenzy. Our numbers are great, but its not new business – it’s getting business that we already have into the dealer so they’re ready,” Keller says.

He adds the concept of a “dating program” – meaning post-dating invoices – allows dealers to buy now and pay later.

“The concept came because if you’re in Northeast and its 20 below zero, you’re not boating. We knew, as distributors, we want to try and make our production a little even (it never will be even – always be high season versus low season). If we can get a bunch of orders shipped into dealer right now, then when season starts, we have big enough trucks to hold it the rest of the year,” he says.

“Product proliferation helps us, but as distributors, you need to know your function. If you don’t add value to the dealer and its customers, you’re toast.”

LNS also touts the “best shows in the industry.”

“Our virtual and in-person shows this past year exceeded expectations. We were very excited about the opportunity to safely host our first in-person show in Connecticut this past November since the pandemic began,” LNS says.

Land ‘N’ Sea is already planning for its future shows, including a marine and RV dealer event in Las Vegas on Oct. 13-14, plus a show with Kellogg Marine slated for Nov. 17-18 in Connecticut. **RV**

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# Jacks of All Trades

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By Lisa Dicksteen

Starting in the marine industry, manufacturer rep firm Derema Group now encompasses the 'outdoor recreation' space at-large.



**Matt Havlik, Derema sales specialist, leads a Samlex-focused training at an RV dealership. Providing training to marine and RV dealership employees is an important role that Derema Group fulfills.**

**B**y their nature, Derema Group's employees are jacks of all trades, pitching in wherever they are needed, whether at dealerships, at shows, or wherever else their responsibilities take them.

"Everyone in the company does everything," says Derema Group President Kurt Forsman. "It just depends what percentage of their day is dedicated to what."

That includes Forsman, who spent a recent Saturday at an RV dealership setting up endcaps.

By structuring the company to mirror a vendor's direct sales-force, he says Derema is positioned to "implement a vendor's holistic plan across the country. They talk to us once and we roll out across the country at the same time, as if it was them."

## Unique in the Industry

Forsman says Westchester, Pa.-based Derema Group is fairly unique among manufacturer rep firms in that it serves both the RV and marine industries. Among the manufacturers Derema currently represents across North America, seven are crossovers. That is, products sell into both the marine and RV industries. Those crossovers include Lumitec (lighting), Magma (outdoor cooking equipment), Orion (safety equipment), Peterson (DOT lighting), Samlex America (power supply), Star brite (cleaning and maintenance) and WOW (inflatable water toys).

Reflecting its strong presence in the RV market, Derema represents seven products exclusively for the RV market: Cofair Prod-





ucts (self-adhesive weather proofing), Flojet (water and wastewater), Hughes Autoformers (voltage boosters and surge protectors), LaSalle Bristol (aftermarket roofing and sealant), PowerMax (battery charging and converting), RV Designer (replacement hardware) and SnapPad (jack pads).

Derema is unique in other ways as well. Unlike most manufacturer's representatives, the company has never gone out looking for brands to add to its roster, according to Forsman. Instead, the company focuses on expanding the brands it does have into different parts of the country, Forsman says, because "not all our brands are in every market, yet."

Every brand Derema works with requested representation, Forsman says, "because they were looking for a different approach." That difference is expressed in several ways. According to Forsman, the first is a cohesive salesforce.

"Other groups are not really groups. They are a collection of individuals who work together under the same name. They are affiliated but not unified," he says. "Our salesforce is unified. Everyone works for Derema, and everyone works together for the good of the client."

"We also offer a lot of things no one else offers, such as eLert and DeremaHelpRV," he adds. "Our overall approach is different, too. We look at the sales cycle as an actual circle, and we start with the consumer. We're not interested in moving product – we're interested in bringing customers into our dealerships and helping



**Kurt Forsman, president of Derema Group, arranges RV SnapPads on a dealership's shelves during a recent visit. Forsman says he and other Derema team members pitch in whenever and wherever they are needed to assist Derema's marine and RV supplier clients.**





**Derema Sales Specialist Teri Barrett (second from right) takes orders from a dealer on behalf of one of its supplier clients at the Arrow Distributing show. Derema got its start as a manufacturer rep firm serving marine suppliers but expanded in 2018 to include the RV industry.**

our dealers make more sales. To do this, we spend time in each dealership and determine how best to merchandise it based on who their customers are, then we train their staff to sell to those customers. Everything we do is in service to our main goal of supporting our dealers.”

### **RV & Marine Part of Larger Outdoor Rec Industry**

The two industries are merging more and more in the minds of consumers – not because they are the same, but because they both fall under the larger rubric of outdoor recreation.

For that reason, Forsman says, “When we decided to move into RVs, we did not frame the expansion as a move into RVs, per se, but as an expansion farther into ‘outdoors’. People want to get out more – and that’s not necessarily in an RV or a boat. In reality, we are specialists not in ‘RV and marine’ but in ‘outdoor recreation’.”

While there are similarities between the RV and marine industries and their customers, Forsman is quick to note that they are “adjacent rather than the same.” One thing that makes them different is that marine is forensic, while RV is serial numbers.

What does that mean?

Forsman explains that when an RV dealer needs to replace a light, they look up the serial number, find it in inventory or order it from the manufacturer, and install it. However, when a marine dealer needs to replace a bow light, they can’t do that.

“They have to physically examine the light and do forensic research to figure out where it came from and how to get a new

one,” he says. “The two mindsets could not be more different.”

Size is the main reason for the disparity. Forsman estimates that there are about 2,500 RV dealers in the U.S., and franchise laws limit the number of dealers in any one state. At the same time, there are about 9,000 marine dealers in the U.S., and some 300 boat builders in the state of Maine alone.

### **Expansion into RV Market a Natural One**

Having started in 2000 as a national sales and marketing solution for the marine industry, Derema entered the RV market in 2018, after multiple customers and vendors began to diversify and encouraged the company to follow suit, saying, “You guys really need to be in RV,” Forsman says.

In addition, suppliers in each market expressed desire to work with the manufacturer rep firm on launching into the new space.

Once the decision was made to expand to the RV market, there was a certain amount of ramping up to do. Forsman, who was part of the sales team at the time, says, “We knew if we were going to enter this new arena, we had to do it right. We hired specialized RV personnel to complement our existing personnel.”

Those newcomers were integrated into the existing sales force, and today, there is no one in the company who handles only one industry or the other, according to Forsman.

In fact, the company’s 24 outside specialists are divided not by industry, but into sales specialists and dealer specialists. There are nine of the latter, and they spend more than 50 percent of their



time calling on dealers. The other 15 team members spend less than 50 percent of their time at dealerships and the rest working on direct accounts, such as distributors, OEMs and retailers, for programs and strategies designed to drive sales for Derema's brands.

How does all this help dealers?

While it's true that the rep ultimately works for the manufacturer, Forsman says, "Dealers that fully engage with the manufacturers' representative tend to be more successful – especially in the retail store area."

For example, Derema "has tools available to help dealers drive more traffic to their location. And when they express their ideas or concerns, (always easier with a rep you have a relationship with), we can address them in a way that is mutually beneficial," he says. "That may include better signage to explain a product or category. It may be a training event for their staff or consumers. Or it may be discount coupons to better hit a price point and drive sales. All of this is customized to that specific dealer or dealer chain."

It's common knowledge that the more you know, the more you can sell, and Derema has expanded its educational and information resources for that reason, according to Forsman.



**During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, which impacted in-person visits to dealerships, Derema Group made use of a virtual presentation, dubbed SHOWUP, to provide dealership employees with information on the latest product developments from the suppliers the company represents.**

*"Other groups are not really groups. They are a collection of individuals who work together under the same name. They are affiliated but not unified. Our salesforce is unified. Everyone works for Derema, and everyone works together for the good of the client."*

**– Derema Group President Kurt Forsman**



**A staff member at Longview RV Superstores (right) talks with Forsman. Derema team members make frequent visits to dealerships on behalf of the suppliers that Derema represents.**





**Forsman works to tidy up a store display in a dealership. Derema Group employs 24 outside specialists, of which nine are dealer specialists and the remaining 15 members are sales specialists who spend much of their time working with direct accounts, including distributors and RV manufacturers.**

*“When we decided to move into RVs, we did not frame the expansion as a move into RVs, per se, but as an expansion farther into ‘outdoors’. People want to get out more and that’s not necessarily in an RV or a boat. In reality, we are specialists not in ‘RV and marine’ but in ‘outdoor recreation’.”*

**– Derema Group President  
Kurt Forsman**



**Forsman organizes merchandise on a dealership's shelves on a recent visit.**

### Offering Tools to Help Partners

Over the past 24 months, Derema has developed and refined tools designed to assist the OEM, installer, dealer, distributor salesman, retail store associate and their vendor brands. Among those assistive technologies are DeremaHelpRV, ShareFile, Maximizer CRM, e-Lerts and more. The underlying theme is providing critical information quickly and accurately.

DeremaHelpRV is an app. It works on Android or Apple smartphones or tablets, and a slightly less functional version works on desktops. On a mobile device, a single click will dial the requested technical assistance. The website [www.deremahelprv.com](http://www.deremahelprv.com) for desktop versions allows users to investigate the overall content and feel are.

“The main idea is to consolidate information that may or may not be available on a vendor’s website into a common easy-to-follow platform, so the user can quickly and seamlessly find information on any of our brands,” Forsman says. “The information included is updated daily to ensure accuracy.”

He adds, “ShareFile and Maximizer CRM are more back-end items that support the market, where you can store all the data. e-Lerts allow us to send that information to a refined list of over 4,000 opt-in RV dealer contacts.”

More products are in development, the company says. In the not-too-distant future, Derema’s Best Brand Rewards LMS will include RV-specific training on Hughes Autoformers, SnapPad, Samlex and others.

### Food for Thought

For RV dealers considering entering the marine market, Forsman says that the skillset is dramatically different. For example, many RV dealers service everything but the motor. At a marine dealership, they fix everything – including motors.

“With an RV, you send powertrain issues to the manufacturer,” he explains. “You fix a boat motor yourself.”

Still, there are dealers who serve customers in both markets well. Forsman says they are successful when they run the two segments as separate entities – “Separate showrooms, separate service departments, even separate entrances. And you have to





A Derema sales specialist tackles merchandising for Star brite's Star Tron-branded Enzyme Fuel Treatment. Derema is notable among manufacturer rep groups in that it represents both marine and RV suppliers, with some products having crossover potential between the two markets.

think a lot about it. It's a commitment. You can't just dabble in marine," he says.

It's essential to know the customers, too.

"Most RVers are in the market for toppers (small boats that can be transported on top of a car or in a small trailer). They are not likely to get into engine parts and manifolds," Forsman says. "The smallest boats, the ones with outboard motors, those are the most sensible for RV dealers."

In the end, dealers really need to talk to an expert before entering the boat market, Forsman says, adding, "If you're thinking of expanding into marine, talk to us. We spend hours each day just having that conversation." **RV**

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# Boomin' in Boise

By Rob Merwin

**Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports opens one of the Northwest's largest showrooms in a new facility and rides the wave of RV and marine sales in its region.**

From its early beginnings in the 1970s as GMC Motorhome Center, the family-owned dealership in Boise, Idaho, is now known simply as DDRV. It has since claimed the mantle as the state's largest motorhome dealer that now also includes marine and motorsport offerings.

Not only has it expanded to a southern California location, but it also sports a brand-new Boise facility.

"We just recently opened up a new, beautiful facility – probably the biggest showroom in the Northwest, that houses all of our RV, marine and powersports divisions," says Jeremy Wemhoff, Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports' sales manager. He has been with the dealership for 12 years, and first cut his teeth as a marine mechanic.

Owned by the Dillon family – which includes founder Dennis Dillon and his son, Brad, who is now the company president – the new 95,000-square-foot facility also includes 10 service bays and an extensive retail department. An additional eight bays are spread throughout the dealership's 46-acre campus.

That's in comparison to the former facility, which was a converted truck service center with four bays and a small office space. DDRV's powersports division – which had been at a separate location in Boise – is now also included, so all offerings are under one roof.

"The new facility launched in February 2020, which, needless to say, was an interesting time to open," chuckles General Manager/Finance Manager Neal Foster, who has been in the industry for 22 years and with DDRV since 2015.







From left to right: the DDRV team includes Jeremy Wemhoff, sales manager; Darin Wilson, sales; Scott Richards, service; Jerry Mangeac, finance; and Shawn Monahay, service.



Family-owned DDRV has two locations. Pictured here is the Boise site, which offers marine, RV and powersports. The dealership touts having one of the largest showrooms in the Northwest.





**Above and below: Service techs Scott Richards (left) and Shawn Monahay work together on a DDRV boat.**

As difficult as it is to compare sales in the past two years to previous years, in terms of company growth, the times have been unprecedented – as they have been across the industry, according to Wemhoff.

“Month after month, our sales keep surprising us every day,” he says.

Between RV and marine, DDRV would typically carry a total of 500 to 600 units, collectively.

“But that was when we were able to get inventory,” Foster says. “Now, it’s whatever we can get – it doesn’t stay around long enough to count it. They (units) are often sold before they get on the lot.”

Having begun with selling RVs only, marine offerings followed when they began to become more available in DDRV’s Boise area, which features several lakes and reservoirs within an hour’s drive, Wemhoff says.

“We filled a need and also filled a hole in our dealership,” he says. “We’re fortunate to have come across good product lines that haven’t been taken – it was a good decision for us.”

About 35 percent of DDRV’s customers own both RVs and marine products, with the majority of customers being marine enthusiasts first.

“In this marketplace, marine dealers are fairly small, whereas RV dealers are a lot bigger,” Foster says. “Our marine market is





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Sales Manager Jeremy Wenhoff (left) and General Manager Neal Foster stand outside of DDRV's location in Boise.

limited here, because tow boats are definitely pricey, beginning around \$100,000, and pontoon boats starting at \$40,000.

"Our marine products are high-end," he adds. "We offer the full spectrum of financing for our customers and we maximize it – it's a strong profit center."

For a dealership that specializes in RV, marine and powersports, DDRV has a broad range of potential manufacturer partners. So, how does it decide which ones to include?

The answer is simple, according to Foster.

"It really comes down to working relationships, first and foremost, from top to bottom," he says. "It comes down to myself, Jeremy and our inventory manager talking to their reps and their service people. You need a good relationship with your manufacturers in order to take care of your customers."

"There aren't nearly as many boat manufacturers as there for RVs," Wenhoff points out, "so finding the right product for the right market is of utmost importance."

As is the right staff, Foster adds.

"The typical RV store that decides they're going to carry boats in the showroom tomorrow won't have any success, because they likely won't have the knowledgeable people and support for them," he says.

For marine manufacturers, DDRV carries Forest River's Trifecta line of pontoon boats, surf/tow boats from Centurion, Supreme and Sanger, as well as personal watercrafts from Sea-Doo. Additional motorsports products also are available.

"The Centurions are the 'cream of the crop' in the tow boat world," Foster says, with Wenhoff adding, "From GPS electronics down to cruise control, they basically do everything for you."

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**Shawn Monahay, who works in service, is an important part of the DDRV team. Despite being a big facility, the dealership claims its culture still feels like a mom-and-pop, hometown business.**



RV manufacturers and offerings, however, outpace those of DDRV's marine products, as well as in sales.

"We carry a bundle: Forest River, Highland Ridge, Winnebago, Roadtrek, Lance, Outdoor RV, Nexus, REV, Fleetwood among others," Wemhoff says. "We carry the full gamut – from entry-level trailers to high-end diesel pushers."

"We're also trending toward an emphasis on Super C motorhomes as the market moves that way," Foster adds. "Everybody in this neck of the woods wants to tow something and have heavy-towing capacity. Many RVers in the Northwest like heavy toys, which are also part of the menu here at DDRV. They also tow horse trailers and race trailers."

As demand remains far greater than supply and shortages continue at the manufacturing level, Foster foresees those trends continuing.

"They won't catch up for a long time, so demand will overwhelm supply into the future," he says.

### **Decisive Company Culture**

In addition to a broad range of offerings, a new facility and strong manufacturer relationships, DDRV also prides itself on its company culture and its employees, which fluctuates around 70, depending on the season.

"We're fast-moving and decisive because we have local ownership that's always available for us," Foster explains. "We don't have to take ideas to a board – we can make changes and decisions rapidly. And despite being a big facility, our culture still feels like a mom-and-pop, hometown business."

"Any successful dealership is based on good processes and making tweaks to those processes quickly to move forward is important – from bringing on a new manufacturer to transitioning an employee to another department."

"Most of our employees were born and raised here (Foster and Wemhoff both consider themselves 'local guys') with a high percentage of our staff being native to the area. They have pride in where they work."



**Nicole Hulbert covers DDRV's administrative and receptionist needs at the Boise site.**





**DDRV's Boise facility sports 95,000 square feet on a 46-acre campus. In addition, the dealership has a California store.**

Most employees are long-term and there's very little turnover, according to Wemhoff.

"Most of that is because of management and how everyone treats each other," he says. "Whether it's the owner talking to a salesperson and so on and so forth – there's great communication throughout the dealership."

Does DDRV have company meetings where staff can pipe up if they want to?

Foster emphatically says no – there's no need.

"Our doors are always open, and if there's an issue, we listen and address it," he says. "There are no closed-door meetings around here and there are no secrets. Everyone feels involved, instead of just taking marching orders. People stay because they like it."

### Service as a Profit Center

When making a sale on a unit, DDRV's 18 service bays are a "great selling feature" and profit center, according to Wemhoff.

"When we're selling an RV to a prospective customer, we can tell them we have a great service facility and we can get them in and out quickly," he says. "It's important to have that."

Each bay is equipped with at least one tech, sometimes two, as DDRV's senior technicians will often have an apprentice working

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Darin Wilson, who works in sales, is pictured by a selection of DDRV's boats and RVs.



Scott Richards, who works in DDRV service, carries out his day-to-day work. The dealership touts 18 service bays as a profit center.

alongside them as well. Word of mouth is the dealership's strongest hand in getting new techs on-board, and while some new hires have little or no experience, it can have its benefits.

"It's good and bad, because you don't want to bring in any bad habits," he adds, "but we can teach them the right way. We can grow our own."

Both men stress that they also maximize all of the training offered by manufacturers.

"It starts with our manufacturers and talking with the reps," Wemhoff explains. "Any information that we can possibly get, we absorb as much as possible."

Foster credits the benefits of the dealership being family-operated and locally owned, saying, "If Jeremy and I want to try something, we can quickly run it up the ladder and we usually get the blessing to do it pretty quickly. If something works great, then we adopt it as a process. If not, we move on. We don't have to worry about a national corporation telling us how we're going to do things, and that extends to training."

### Retail with Abundance of Display Space

DDRV's retail department has about 10,000 square feet of display area and an abundance of over-the-counter retail offerings, as well as a "giant" parts department that's housed between service, Foster says, though he adds, "We normally have a lot of parts, but the pandemic has changed how much we can get and stock."

From summertime products to jackets and boots for colder seasons, DDRV's accessories and parts employees are often chal-



*“As difficult as it is to compare sales in the past two years to previous years, in terms of company growth, the times have been unprecedented – as they have been across the industry.”*

**– Jeremy Wemhoff, Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports’ sales manager**

lenged with rotating seasonal offerings and retail presentations at least twice a year to cater to different clientele.

To assist toward that end, DDRV’s suppliers provide end-caps and promotional items throughout the year depending on the season.

“Because we offer RV, marine and powersport products, the list of our suppliers is as long as your arm,” Foster says.

#### **Expansion into Southern California**

DDRV also launched a second, RV-only location seven years ago in Westminster, Calif., to serve buyers who were traveling to its Boise location for RVs.

“We wanted to expand our business, and as we were doing a lot of sales in Boise, we discovered that many people were coming up from the Southern California area to buy,” Wemhoff explains. “We were able to locate an old car dealership and turn it into one of the nicest RV dealerships down there.”

Opening a dealership in California had its challenges.

“It’s difficult to do business in, period. And frankly, it’s difficult to open anything anywhere, because you have to consider what products are in that area and which ones are available for you,” Wemhoff says. “We couldn’t have opened another one here in Boise because there wouldn’t have been a single unit to put on a new lot.

“We try to mirror what we have here in Boise in Westminster, but in some cases our products are already in existing dealerships, but we do a good job at it, and we can transfer product where we can,” he adds.

Having good systems and processes in place that can be replicated at a new location is of paramount importance, according to Wemhoff.

“When we opened up, we went down there and helped the new team and taught them, so they were on the same page as the Idaho location,” he says.

Staffing also can commonly be challenging, but DDRV was fortunate that another Westminster RV dealership had recently closed, so DDRV could obtain some of the store’s past employees.

“Nearly everybody at our dealerships are enthusiasts in their divisions,” Foster says, and both men say they have a passion for what they sell, which is the main thing.

“While we have a family atmosphere, we’re also professionals who take pride in what we do. And we have a wonderful facility we get to walk into every day,” Foster adds. “There’s pride in where you hang your hat.” **RV2**



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# Power Solutions for Land or Sea

By K. Schipper

**Samlex America is known to many in the RV market for its solar power panels and kits, but the company offers a wide range of power solutions to the marine industry as well.**

**OEM**s and dealers in the RV industry recognize the name of Samlex America as serving “land yachts,” but the company also has a robust business selling to real yachts as well.

The company has been supplying power solutions to RVs for much of its 31-year history. The same can be said for the marine market. However, it’s only within the past decade that the company has really beefed up its presence – and its products – for water adventurers.

Jonathan Krawchuk, the company’s channel account manager for the RV and marine markets, says not only are there a lot of similarities between the two, but in a lot of places RV dealers are also selling boats, plus, “It’s an exciting market,” he says.

There are some differences, though. Not only do a lot of products used by mariners need to be more durable to deal with a tougher environment and more demanding standards, but there’s a commercial side to boating that ties back to Samlex’s origins in the wireless telecommunications and mobile fleet markets.

## Marine Market Requires ‘Robustness in Products’

It’s probably a testament to the quality of Samlex’s power products that people in both the marine and RV industries were originally buying them through channels not set up for either market. With the organic growth of both markets, it also made sense for the company to put more effort into them, according to Krawchuk.

“Our products have been sold in a lot of different markets,” he says. “We were focusing on the RV market for a longer period than we were the marine market. It’s really been within the last 10 years that we started focusing on the marine market, with established distribution channels and marine-specific literature.”

Krawchuk adds that not only is recreation a large and interesting market, but many RV owners also have boats, and there are dealers who sell both.

“We found there were a lot of people who are RVers who found one of our inverters or a solar system was useful, and they realized it was something they could use on their boats as well,” he says.



Samlex America executive team enjoys a moment of levity during a recent meeting at the company’s offices in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Pictured from left to right are: Mike Berg (industry manager), Cody Berg (industry manager), Mike Hamanishi (president), Christie Kellogg (marketing manager) and Shawn Dahya (director of sales).

Earl Berg (pictured at right) founded Samlex in his garage in 1991. Today, the company is a leading manufacturer of power conversion products with a presence in more than 90 companies.







**Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets, highlights the Dealer Success Binder, which simplifies power and solar requirements in RVs and boats and helps dealers determine their customer's mobile power needs.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMLEX AMERICA

Not only that, but the needs of the recreational customers in both markets are similar – although not identical.

“They both want to power the same things,” Krawchuk says. “It may be a microwave to heat up dinner or a coffeemaker, or an entertainment system. Or they may want to charge up some batteries in a camera.”

At the same time, he says the markets work in much the same way. That means having distributors who sell to dealers who then retail boats and aftermarket products.

Perhaps where the two markets diverge is in the need for what Krawchuk refers to as “robustness in products” in the marine market. He explains that while having a product on an RV fail somewhere out in the boondocks can be a problem, if that occurs in the middle of a lake or out in the ocean, the situation might be dire.

“They want to make sure that something’s going to work well for them, and that the installation is done to the highest standard,” Krawchuk says. “It’s going to do more than ruin your day – especially when we look at commercial fisheries where boats are being used for work.”

### **RV & Marine Markets Similar ... But Different**

That’s a big reason behind Samlex’s move to have most of its marine products certified for electrical safety by Intertek’s ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories), as well as supplemental certification for the marine market. The company also has certifications for its inverter/charger series from the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC).

“People look to see if it’s a marinized product,” Krawchuk says. “For example, with our inverter/chargers, the circuit boards have

*“We found there were a lot of people who are RVers who found one of our inverters or a solar system was useful, and they realized it was something they could use on their boats as well.”*

**– Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets**



**Francis Natividad, a technical specialist at Samlex, programs an EVO inverter/charger for a lithium battery using the Samlex EVO RC Plus remote control.**





**Samlex America is buzzing with activity these days, thanks in part to the robust demand for boats and RVs.**

*“We’re going to see more boats with solar panels on them; we’re going to see inverters coming standard on a lot more boats over the next few years; and we’re probably going to see lithium batteries become more popular. We’re already seeing that in the RV industry and the boating industry is happening the same way.”*

**– Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets**



**Samlex is equally at home providing products to the RV and marine markets. Pictured here is one of the company’s EVO inverter/charger installed on a boat named Seapiper.**

a certain coating on them, so the salt air doesn’t corrode them as quickly.”

Installation isn’t quite the same, either. He says installers know that inverters and inverter/chargers must be installed where they’re not going to be splashed by water, which often means a sealed compartment.

Having those inverter/chargers certified is important because of the importance of inverters to the marine industry. However, it also points to a couple other differences between that market and RVs. While inverters are big in both markets, in the marine industry it’s almost exclusively pure sine, and often marine customers are running more 24-volt equipment than the average RV.

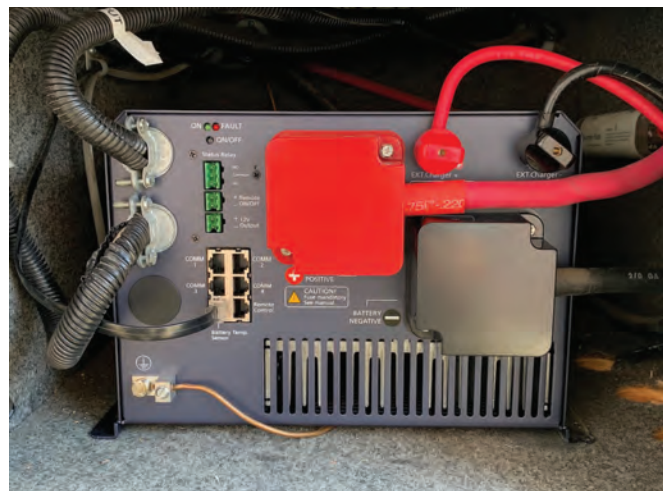
By comparison, Krawchuk says the company sells almost no 24-volt equipment to the RV industry.

“The needs of the recreational customer are quite similar in both markets,” he says. “However, in commercial boats, there are things they need to be powering. For instance, we’ve run into people needing to power RFID (radio frequency identification) scanners to tag their catch. It’s also common for them to run power tools and heavy-duty equipment.”

There also is something of a different approach to powering devices on a boat versus an RV. Someone boondocking in their RV may rely on a solar system and battery power. However, the average boater has that engine under power a great deal of the time charging batteries.

“Of course, if you’re in a sailboat, it’s a little bit different,” Krawchuk observes. “But, if you’re looking at a boat with an engine, people will have an inverter and a battery system because they don’t want to have to burn all their gasoline.”

One popular use, he says, is to power a small air conditioner, so the engine doesn’t have to run at night. And, yes, there are



**The Samlex America Evolution F Series EVO-1212F Inverter/Charger is a 1,200-watt pure sine wave inverter with 60-amp adaptive battery charger and 30-amp transfer relay – all in one unit. This heavy-duty inverter/charger is designed to provide reliable AC power wherever it’s needed, including boats, RVs, cabins and specialty vehicles.**





Samlex inverters undergo testing prior to being shipped to dealers.

boat owners – primarily sailboats and pontoons – that install solar systems on their craft.

“The sail-boating crowd is the bulk of it,” Krawchuk says. “With those boats, there’s a pretty good amount of real estate on the deck for solar panels, and they want to be able to crank the stereo and keep those batteries charged. Some people just have a small solar system on them they use either when they’re sitting at the dock or if they’re moored somewhere just to keep the charge in their batteries.”

### Samlex Offers Service & Support

As with the RV industry, Samlex’s marine customers are a mix of new boat buyers and those who are upgrading an existing setup. Krawchuk says there really is no bad time to install a power system or an inverter or even upgrade to solar.

Most of the work is done at the dealer level.

“Probably the best time is when a person is buying the boat initially,” Krawchuk says. “If you’re buying from a dealer a lot of the dealers will do the work for the customer. However, you can always add on as an aftermarket thing.”

Unlike the RV industry, however, Samlex also works with some of the boat builders, especially when it comes to installing inverters.

“We take a look at what the needs of their customers are, what types of markets they serve and whether they’re building a big boat or a smaller boat,” he says. “A lot of these builders are different than the RV manufacturers, just because when you’re getting a boat built there’s a lot more room for customization with the factory. For instance, they’ll build a custom installation for the inverter for each boat that they’re doing.”



Samlex offers a wide array of power products, including battery chargers, transfer switches, AC-DC supplies, as well as inverters and solar power panels (pictured).





**Gray Ghost Restorations in British Columbia, Canada, did a renovation of an Airstream trailer that included installing solar power panels and a Samlex EVO-2212 inverter/charger, plus an EVO-RC-PLUS remote in the coach. Gray Ghost is a strong believer in Samlex products. (Photos courtesy of Marc Terrien of Thin Air Web)**

Although that may be different, much of the rest of Samlex's work with the marine industry closely mirrors its work with RVs. Both markets are served by the manufacturer's rep firm Derema Group.

"They support our dealers in terms of rolling out new products and helping with displaying the product, answering questions and supporting us at shows," Krawchuk says. "They're all about supporting that dealer network and they work closely with our distribution channel to make sure the dealers are able to get our product and get it on-time."

Of course, with COVID-19 and current supply chain issues, that's proving to be more of a challenge these days, especially since Samlex sources components from all over the world.

"The last two years have been a really different ballgame for everybody," Krawchuk says. "We've had to adapt a lot of things, but I think it's improving. And, because we're in several different markets besides RV and marine, we're able to have higher stocking levels in all those markets, which is to our benefit."

The other area where the two markets closely mirror each other is with Samlex's use of its "Dealer Success Binder," which – as RV dealers know – allows whoever is talking to a particular customer to be able to effectively size out a system that best meets that customer's needs.

"Of course, we have marine-specific marketing literature and marine-specific catalogs," he says. "That way we're sure to feature





Among the many markets that Samlex serves are communications, mobile fleet, fixed off-grid, OEM and off-road.

applications that are specific to the marine industry. So, it's the same but different."

And, as with the RV industry, the company also supports that with a calculator on its website that also walks a dealer or customer through the system. The same information also is available through customer service at Samlex's toll-free phone number.

Nor does service stop with the sale. Krawchuk says owners of Samlex products who are having problems can have them resolved through dealers, marinas or even boat supply stores.

While the company offers at a minimum a two-year warranty on its products, one of the advantages with its inverters is a diagnostic feature on them.

"A customer can put a memory card in it, and then email the file to our tech team," Krawchuk says. "We can take a look at it remotely and it avoids having people trying to troubleshoot these things or shipping them back to where they bought it."

Regardless of what its marine customers are looking for, Krawchuk says he's confident that segment of Samlex's customer base will continue to grow.

"We're going to see more boats with solar panels on them; we're going to see inverters coming standard on a lot more boats over the next few years; and we're probably going to see lithium batteries become more popular," he says. "We're already seeing that in the RV industry and the boating industry is happening the same way." **RVP**

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# Star brite

FT. LAUDERDALE, FL

## A 'Brite' Future

By Darian Armer

**When it comes to Star brite, selling one automotive product can lead to a successful business serving multiple markets – and even garner the support of the Miami Dolphins' cheerleaders.**

**I**t's been a busy 50 years for Star brite – which celebrates five decades in business next year – and things have only gotten busier for the marine and RV supplier in recent years.

The company, which makes waxes, polishes, and other cleaning products, started out in 1973 with one automotive product: Star brite Auto Polish. Star brite capitalized on its marketing efforts at the time to create memorable and well-known Star brite commercials, including the “Junkyard Test” and the Star brite cheerleaders.

The “Junkyard Test” commercial featured an automobile selected from a junk yard and transformed into a vehicle of beauty in minutes, utilizing Star brite Polish. This led to the development of an expanded lineup of products for auto appearance and maintenance. The Miami Dolphins' cheerleaders became the “Star brites” as part of the promotion in 1981, where they helped promote a store opening, special sales and other events.

It was during this growth in the mid-1980s that Star brite began shifting its product focus to the marine industry. What followed was a lineup of boat care and appearance products.

Since then, Star brite has expanded beyond marine and automotive into the RV industry, aircraft, home care, aviation, outdoor power equipment, powersports and motorcycle markets.

Today, Star brite's corporate offices are located in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where it employs 50 people. The main production facility is in Montgomery, Ala., where the company manufactures all of the molding of bottles, water and oil-based products, as well as distribution, research and development. The company employs more than 150 people at the production facility in Alabama.



Yogi – who belongs to Greg Dornau, executive vice president of sales and marketing, and Peter Dornau, Star brite founder and CEO – attends a show with the Star brite team. Star brite is a proudly dog-friendly company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STAR BRITE



## Entering the RV Industry

When it comes to the RV industry, Star brite initially got into the business 20 years ago – and fairly quickly got out of it.

“There were a lot of synergies between the marine and RV industries back then. The fiberglass is the same on a boat as an RV. There were and are a lot of synergies between the auto, marine and RV marketplace. They found it was a profitable opportunity for them,” says Eric Hahn, director of sales and marketing. “They got out because so many competitors had entered the marketplace with watered-down formulas they sold for cheap.”

Star brite re-entered the RV industry in 2016, when Hahn says the company felt an increase in demand from the consumer for a quality product.

“There wasn’t suddenly a huge shrink in the number of competitors,” says Hahn. “We felt the need to enter back in with a product that wasn’t the lowest or highest price point, but a really quality product at a quality price.”

The company says it targets the outdoorsman, and all the many outdoor vehicles and boats they might use.

“With the RV industry, we’re essentially appealing to the outdoor enthusiast. Someone who wants to take in adventure, get outside and see something different,” says Hahn. “Whether it’s a hunter, fisherman, camper, RVer or boater, in our minds they all do fall into a similar category. We’re really speaking to that



*“The marine and RV industry have done phenomenally well. What better way to socially distance and get out of the house than in a RV or boat? We’ve seen some really unprecedented growth.”*

**– Eric Hahn, Star brite  
director of sales and marketing**



**At Star brite, every phone call is answered by a real person. The company’s sales team doubles as the customer service team. Pictured from left to right are: June Strasser; Ryan Grubbs, inside sales representative; Erik Applegate, director of sales and marketing; Eric Hahn, director of sales and marketing; Turner Burwick; and Derick Cote, key account manager.**





**A Star brite boat gets a scrub. The company's boat care offerings include cleaners, mold control, polishes and waxes, plus care products for metal, plastic, vinyl and teakwood.**



**Labels for Star brite's Mildew Stain Remover, which cleans vinyl seats, cushions and covers, are ready to adhere to bottles on the production line.**



class of customer. It makes sense, especially for RV and marine dealerships that have a lot of crossover and who are targeting the same customer. A lot of customers have both a boat and a RV."

Hahn says the company knows that its products aren't used for the necessarily fun parts of RVing.

"Our products are designed to be fast and effective. We know cleaning and maintaining your RV is not the most enjoyable part of owning an RV, so we give them a product that works fast and easy and has a long-lasting effect," says Hahn.

Star brite has about 960 active SKUs throughout all its channels. Many products have a lot of crossover between industries and can be used in multiple markets. Hahn says the highest volume products for the RV market are mildew stain remover, rubber roof cleaner and protectant, and their new boiler system anti-freeze for heat-exchange systems and radiant heat.

Star brite only uses distributors to sell its product. Hahn says they use every major distributor to help get their products onto dealer's shelves.

### **COVID-19 Ups the Ante**

Just like many other companies that serve the outdoor industry, Star brite saw a large boom in demand for its products following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The marine and RV industry have done phenomenally well. What better way to socially distance and get out of the house than in a RV or boat? We've seen some really unprecedented growth," says Hahn.



With the onslaught of new customers to both industries, Hahn says there's a need for education for new customers.

"Our big marketing message we're pushing to dealers is that they need to educate their customers. The customer has bought this new \$20,000 to \$200,000 RV or boat, and now they need to maintain it properly, protect it from the roads, salt and weather. We need dealers to be telling customers, 'You've made a new investment, now make sure you protect your investment.' We want to get customers hooked on a good maintenance regimen," says Hahn.

"From the dealership side, that's something else to sell to the consumer. You just sold a RV or boat – you want that customer coming back into the shop to not only buy big things or when something is broken, but to buy something every time they walk through the door. Engine fuels or antifreeze for winterization. There's something in the Star brite lineup for the customer, every time. It's a must have to build that repeat customer business."

One way Star brite plans to help do this is to provide resources for dealers and their customers.



**Chemical tanks located at Star brite's manufacturing facility in Montgomery, Ala., store product before its packaged.**

*"Our products are designed to be fast and effective. We know cleaning and maintaining your RV is not the most enjoyable part of owning an RV, so we give them a product that works fast and easy and has a long-lasting effect."*

**– Eric Hahn, Star brite  
director of sales and marketing**



**Eric Hahn, the company's director of sales and marketing, talks with attendees about Star brite's products at a distributor show.**





Patrick Pierce (pictured in truck) is a BASS pro fisherman sponsored by Star brite's Star Tron brand. Pierce is pictured here with his Triton boat in tow.



Kinpak - a sister company of Star brite - is a vertical manufacturer that blends both water- and oil-based products for the marine, RV, auto and home care markets.



## Resources for Dealers

Kouri Carey, director of product, marketing and media for Star brite, says the company came back to the RV industry with a smaller, more focused lineup of products.

"We brought all our black streak removers, washes and waxes, but we brought a lot of unique items as well, things like our magic erasers," he says. "We also brought air care products. Our No Damp product draws moisture out of the atmosphere in the RV, so it doesn't develop mold. It's a type of gas that fills the RV or boat and prevents mold from growing in the first place. We also have an all-natural lineup of RV care that uses tea tree oils."

Carey says they are in the process of reinventing their brand, including updating an outdated website.

"We have a very outdated website and that's becoming a pain point. Instead of just upgrading to whatever is now available, we're trying to think a step ahead to what our customers are going to want," Carey says. "With so many new people coming into the RV, marine, UTV and ATV industries, we want to be a source for maintenance questions that come through our website, social or search. We want people to be able to find the right product for their circumstance, whether by surface, by stain or by project. We're taking the customer focus and putting it front and center."

The website is still in development currently, but Carey says the company also plans to have information that is project-oriented by what the products can help a customer do and where to buy them.

"For us, it's all about penetrating the RV market and letting dealers know Star brite is back in the market with unique product offerings, rebate programs and a constant drive for innovation," says Hahn. "We're constantly looking for faster ways to clean, maintain and protect your RVs with less effort. The ultimate goal is for





people to enjoy using their RVs more and maintaining them less.”

Another large part of Starbrite’s efforts to support the industries its products are in is through creating awareness around the industries it serves. Starbrite sponsors eight TV shows on prime-time television and the Discovery Channel. There are even some slated to air on ESPN this year. Starbrite is a title sponsor for the new show, ‘RV There Yet?’ out on Discovery. It follows a group’s RVing adventures throughout national parks.

“We’ll also feature ‘Starbrite Adventures,’ on our website and social media. They’ll be little snippets and series of real trips that real people are making. Sometimes the trip is even just a backyard adventure. It’s the chance to watch our pros or normal Joes do what they’re doing. We tag our products you need along the way. It’s not completely product-focused, though,” says Carey.

“We want to keep people engaged in that lifestyle. We see people come back to the dock after a day of fishing, sharing stories, almost like campfire stories. On the RV side, it does become a campfire story, usually over a bucket of suds. A big component of our social media is to be as entertaining as we are informative.”

Carey says Starbrite is not just building followers – it’s engaging real people and creating forums for those people to share.

“Something that’s really important for our dealer network to know is that the reason we create all these marketing pieces for web and social is so we can share all that with our dealers,” he says. “As we create our library of content, we’ll make it accessible so dealers can use it. All the product assets, Q&As, Adventure Series content, product endorsements and other resources will be available to them for use in their dealerships and to enhance their social media presence.” **RV2**

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SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# Marine Accessories

Life on the water is a dream for many, but no voyage can fully embark without the necessary products that make boating more efficient and enjoyable. This month's special section features various marine product offerings, ranging from Bimini tops and waterproof speakers to power sources and marine-grade cleaners.

For more information on the products in this section, type the website address that appears below a respective product listing into your browser. Viewers of the magazine's digital version can click on any listing and be taken directly to the respective company's website.

## MILDEW STAIN REMOVER

**Star brite**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., offers its Mildew Stain Remover that quickly removes unsightly mold and mildew stains from fiberglass, vinyl, plastic, wood, concrete, tile and more. It begins working on contact. The buffered bleach formula will not harm vinyl upholstery or threads. Designed for tough marine environments, its mold and mildew stain-busting power can be safely used inside and outside boats and RVs.

[www.starbrite.com/](http://www.starbrite.com/)



## BOAT SPEAKER

**ASA Electronics**, Elkhart, Ind., presents its Polk Speaker UMS66SR. The Polk Ultramarine is stylish, high-performance audio that takes boating to the next level. This Polk 6.6" speaker looks sharp and sleek with its rich Smoke color and low-profile trim.

[www.polkmarine.com/](http://www.polkmarine.com/)





## PORTABLE GRILL

**Camco Manufacturing**, Greensboro, N.C., offers its Kuuma Stow N Go 160 Gas Grill. This grill is ideal for boating, RVing, tailgating and patios/decks. It is easy to transport and mounts to any Kuuma rail, rod or pedestal. Works with 1-pound throwaway propane cylinders. Features a large cooking area of 160 square inches. High-quality, lightweight 304 stainless steel increases flavor while minimizing flare-ups. The stainless-steel burner heats up fast, is easy to clean and resists rust. Integrated folding legs are perfect for tabletop use and the grill is easy to assemble.

[www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)

## INVERTER/CHARGER

**Samlex America**, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, presents its 3-in-1 marine power solution. The Evolution Series Inverter/Charger provides reliable household power when off-grid or off-shore, and with its three-times surge capacity, it powers high-surge items like microwaves. It also is compatible with lead-acid and lithium batteries and meets ABYC marine electrical standards. For those who spend time on the water, whether it is work or play, the EVO Series provides the peace of mind of clean, efficient access to power – no matter how far off-shore boaters go.

<https://samlexamerica.com/industries/marine/>



## TEAK OIL & SEALER

**BoatLIFE**, a division of **Life Industries Corp.**, North Charleston, S.C., offers its Teak Brite oil and sealer. The most advanced teak oil and sealer available will deliver long-lasting protection, even in tropical climates. It penetrates deep into cleaned and dry wood to feed and protect finish. It will help preserve teak wood for years to come. Available in Natural and Golden hues, and in quarts, gallons and bulk sizes.

[www.boatlife.com](http://www.boatlife.com)

## REVERSE POLARITY INDICATOR

**SmartPlug Systems**, Seattle, presents its Reverse Polarity Indicator Light System. Reverse polarity is a safety concern that can damage electrical components on a vessel. On the top of all the SmartPlug coach-side

power cord connectors are two LED Indicator Lights. When the SmartPlug is connected to a power source, the lights will illuminate to indicate the status of a safe or unsafe condition. Smartplug's cord sets are weatherproof and easy to use, plus they ensure families can safely enjoy their next adventure.

[www.smartplug.com](http://www.smartplug.com)







### MULTI-PURPOSE WASH BRUSH

**Easy Reach Supply**, Hattiesburg, Miss., offers its Multi-Purpose Wash Brush. The unique, oval-shaped brush is ideal for multiple cleaning applications. The flagged green Nyltex Bristles increase soap and water retention and are ideally suited for all surfaces including painted, gel coat and polished aluminum. The three-hole block allows brush use at multiple angles, making it an all-in-one brush. Easy Reach Supply brushes are proudly made in the U.S.A.

<https://easyreachinc.com/?product=196>



### WATER PURIFIER

**Acuva Technologies**, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, offers its most popular water purifier for boats – the ArrowMAX 2.0, eliminating up to 99.9999 percent of bacteria and viruses to provide safe drinking water straight out of the tap. Included with an advanced pre-filter, the unit will also remove lead, heavy metals, chlorine, mercury, carcinogens and other contaminants, as well as turbidity and unpleasant odors and tastes. Boaters will never have to worry about the quality of their water ever again – no matter where they fill their tanks.

[www.acuvatech.com](http://www.acuvatech.com)



### BLACK HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Walex Products**, Wilmington, N.C., offers its Porta-Pak black holding tank treatment that keeps your travels “Odor-Free on land or sea.” With Porta-Pak, Walex was the first company to introduce a portion-controlled, water-soluble sachet into the portable toilet and RV industries. Since its introduction, Porta-Pak has remained the No. 1 holding tank treatment worldwide within multiple industries. Its proprietary formula eliminates odor-causing bacteria working in temperatures above 100 degrees. It’s offered in two refreshing fragrances: Fresh and Lavender Breeze.

[www.walex.com/product/porta-pak-2/](http://www.walex.com/product/porta-pak-2/)

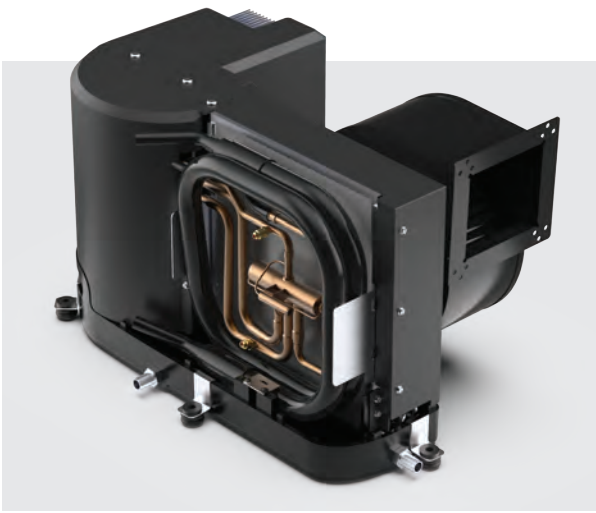


### BOAT CARE PRODUCTS

**Boat Bling**, Phoenix, Ariz., offers its Bling Sauce care products. Bling Sauce was founded in 2004 by two avid boaters and friends with the goal of bringing premium, innovative products to the boating market. As the Bling Sauce name became synonymous with boating, Bling Sauce decided to expand its world-class care products to additional industry segments including RVs, UTVs, automotive and aviation. Today, Bling Sauce is distributed globally across 10 countries and is sold at more than 6,000 retail outlets including Walmart, Bass Pro, Academy Sports, Camping World and more.

[www.blingsauce.com](http://www.blingsauce.com)





## MARINE AIR CONDITIONER

**Dometic Marine**, Litchfield, Ill., presents its Voyager Series TX Marine A/C. The product features innovative variable capacity design that regulates compressor speed based on the cooling or heating demands of the vessel. The new series targets smaller vessels with self-contained DX cooling technology. The variable capacity feature ensures that vessel occupants enjoy enhanced comfort and quieter operation, along with reduced energy costs and greater system durability. A special Sleep Mode allows for quiet and uninterrupted sleep when onboard.

[www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)



## WIRELESS PHONE CHARGER

**Scanstrut**, Westbrook, Conn., introduces the Scanstrut ROKK Wireless Nest, designed to safely house and wirelessly charge cellphones. Now, users can keep their phone in a safe place onboard, tucked away, charged, and ready to go. This is the world's first 12/24V waterproof wireless charge system, ready for life on the go. Perfect for integration into seating, cabinetry, the grippy mat stops phones from sliding. The front lip, with an easy access thumb bevel, acts as a safety barrier, making sure your phone stays in the Nest.

[www.scanstrut.com/vanlife](http://www.scanstrut.com/vanlife)

## DRY HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Valterra Products**, Mission Hills, Calif., offers its Odorlos Dry Holding Tank Treatment – a non-toxic, biodegradable treatment that prevents odors and clogs by breaking down waste in black water and gray water tanks. Scent-free formula eliminates odors instead of masking them. Formaldehyde-free, nitrate formula breaks down tissue and waste quickly and easily. Each 6-pound tub contains 24 treatments (1 ounce per every 10 gallons) and a 2-ounce scooper. It is safe and effective in all RV and marine holding tank and septic tank systems and remains effective in extreme temperatures.



[www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)

## CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM

**MTI Industries**, Destin, Fla., presents its battery-operated

CO alarm. The Safe-T-Alert Battery Operated RV Carbon Monoxide Alarm, model SA-340, includes a sealed-in lithium battery – no replacement needed. This alarm conforms to ANSI/UL STD 2034 and meets RVIA/NFPA



requirements. The SA-340 has a full five-year service life and built-in test/hush functions. Easy installation.

[www.mtiindustries.com/](http://www.mtiindustries.com/)

## MACERATING TOILET

**Thetford**, Ann Arbor, Mich., offers its TECMA Silence Plus 2G – a ceramic macerating toilet that offers the largest bowl in the TECMA line. It has a powerful, quiet and fast-flushing macerator pump capable of pushing 36' vertically and 295' horizontally. It comes in both high and low profiles, with a SloClose wood resin seat, cover and stainless-steel hinges. All these great features make the TECMA Silence Plus 2G a highly effective and comfortable choice for yachts and powerboats.

[www.thetfordmarine.com/us/](http://www.thetfordmarine.com/us/)







## FIBERGLASS CLEANER

**Bio-Kleen Products**, Kalamazoo, Mich., presents its fiberglass cleaner to remove chalking, algae, rust, scale, lime, brown waterline stains and oxidation from boats. It is also great for removing chalking, oxidation and yellow stains from an RV fiberglass exterior. It easily removes mineral deposits on outdrives, thru-hall boat exhaust and cleaning pontoon tubes. It's also great for deep cleaning aluminum. A clinging spray-on gel that sticks, increasing surface penetration and dwell time.

[www.biokleen.com](http://www.biokleen.com)



## MARINE & RV WASHDOWN PUMPS

**Xylem**, Beverly, Mass., presents the Jabsco Hot Shot Washdown Pump. The company says it offers the widest and most powerful lineup of marine and RV water and washdown pumps. Ranging from 3 gallons to 6 gallons per minute, these pumps are powerful and long lasting.

[www.xylem.com](http://www.xylem.com)



## SHRINK WRAP

**Dr. Shrink**, Manistee, Mich., presents its Premium Shrink Wrap. Dr. Shrink is one-stop shopping for all shrink wrap products and accessories, including heat tools, tapes/adhesives, zipper access doors and venting. Dr. Shrink has formulated its own shrink wrap for unbeatable performance in all weather conditions. The premium shrink wrap is 100 percent virgin resin with maximum UV-inhibitors built in for long-term usage. Dr. Shrink stocks shrink wrap in widths of 12 to 60 feet, ships to anywhere in the world and distributes its products to more than 80 countries.

[www.dr-shrink.com](http://www.dr-shrink.com)



## EXTERIOR SPRAY FAUCET KIT

**Dura Faucet**, Camas, Wash., presents its Exterior Quick Connect Spray Dock Kit, available in either black or white/blue. This spray dock comes with our user-friendly quick connection. Whether boaters are washing down their boat or cleaning their big catch, the 15' coil hose and seven function multi-spray nozzle makes these tasks easier to do than cruising on the water.

[www.durafaucet.com](http://www.durafaucet.com)





## SINE WAVE INVERTER

**Xantrex**, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, presents its Freedom XC Pro – a true sine wave inverter with a built-in lithium-ion battery charger and transfer switch. Easy to install with quick connect terminals and charges any battery chemistry, including lithium-ion. The Freedom XC Pro has a built-in NMEA-2K connector for integration with NMEA-compliant multi-function panels. Users can view and configure via Bluetooth app on iOS and Android. Runs sensitive loads like an induction cooktop, microwave and AC fridge with no issues. Has 50A passthrough charging and powering loads at the dock. Compact 3,000-watt/150A inverter and charger weighs only 18 pounds.

[www.xantrex.com/power-products/inverter-chargers/freedom-xcpromarine.aspx](http://www.xantrex.com/power-products/inverter-chargers/freedom-xcpromarine.aspx)



## WATER HOSE

**Teknor Apex**, Pawtucket, R.I., presents its Zero-G RV Marine water hose. Available in 25' and 50', Teknor Apex's Zero-G RV Marine water hoses are drinking water safe, 40 percent lighter in weight than vinyl hoses, kink-free and easy to manage. 600-plus PSI burst rated and has crush-resistant couplings. The Zero-G's advanced engineering guarantees zero tolerance with issues such as restrictive water flow, leaking and bursting. The product comes with a five-year warranty.

[www.apexhose.com/zero-g-rv-marine-hose](http://www.apexhose.com/zero-g-rv-marine-hose)



## BIMINI TOPS

**Carver by Covercraft**, Landrum, S.C., presents its Carver Bimini Tops, available in 2-bow, 3-bow and 4-bow round tube, and 4-bow square tube, to suit virtually any type of boat. The tops are available in premium 100 percent solution dyed marine acrylic, in a variety of colors.

[www.carvercovers.com](http://www.carvercovers.com)



## BATTERY DISCONNECT

**Intellitec Products**, DeLand, Fla., offers its 100-amp, water-resistant Battery Disconnect – a simple, reliable and cost-effective way to disconnect the battery of a boat. Operable from a conveniently located switch, no longer search for your battery disconnect. Intellitec's water-resistant version shields against leakage, as well as uses stainless steel, to prevent rusting from the elements. Intellitec's patented, continuous duty, latching relay prevents battery discharge when active. A trusted electronic solution, there are more than 2 million in usage today.

<https://intellitec.com>



## T-TOP BOAT COVER

**Classic Accessories**, Kent, Wash., offers its StormPro T-Top Boat Cover to provide a heavy-duty solution designed for long-term storage. The marine-grade fabric won't shrink or stretch, and its coating repels water and withstands sun exposure. Elastic cording provides a tight, custom-like fit; adjustable straps and quick-release buckles keep the cover secure. Available for boats from 16' to 22' long and beam widths from 96" to 106" wide, with cuts to allow room for accessories such as bow rails and running lights. Five-year warranty.



<https://classicaccessories.com/covers/boat-personal-watercraft>



## MARINE DISH SET

**Camp Casual**, Clarence Center, N.Y., presents its Marine Dish Set. Richly colored and vintage marine-inspired graphics decorate this shatter-resistant, melamine BPA-free set of dishes. Each set contains two 11" dinner plates, two 8" salad plates and two 6" bowls.

[www.campcasual.com](http://www.campcasual.com)



## COMBINATION STOVE/HEATER

**Scan Marine Equipment**, Seattle, offers its Wallas Nordic Dt, a fully controllable diesel-fired stove and heater combination suitable for RV, trailer and marine use. Variable power produces up to 1,900 watts (6,600 BTU/hour) of cooking or heating power, which means the Nordic Dt can heat many boats effectively, using less than 7 ounces of fuel per hour. Incorporating altitude compensation, thermo room sensing and push-button starting, the Nordic Dt is designed to be quiet and easy to clean.

[www.scanmarineusa.com](http://www.scanmarineusa.com)

## WATER FILTER SYSTEM

**Periodic Products**, Sarasota, Fla., presents its FillFast Water Filter Systems. FillFast patented, non-toxic, pleated filter media filters high levels of stain-causing metals like rust, iron, copper and manganese from source water. FillFast also helps extend the life of RO membranes and water softener resins. Used with a water softener, FillFast creates spot-free water for washing RV or marine vessels. Pre-filters up to 10,000 gallons of water before needing to replace filters and is designed for easy portability. Save time! Save money!

[www.fillfastfilters.com](http://www.fillfastfilters.com)





### HOSE/CORD CADDY

**Stromberg Carlson**, Traverse City, Mich., presents its HC-75 Hose/Cord Caddy. The hose/cord caddy solves the twisted and tangled hose storage problem. Each hose end unwinds while the bulk of the hose remains neat and tidy in the caddy. It holds up to 75' of water hose or 50' of 30-amp cord. The stackable Hose/Cord Caddy measures 17" wide and 6.5" tall. Hose accessories can be conveniently stored in the center well. Made in the U.S.A.

[www.StrombergCarlson.com](http://www.StrombergCarlson.com)



### WATERPROOF LED SPEAKERS

**PQN Audio**, Morro Bay, Calif., offers its Waterproof BT LED Speakers. The company's new 6.5" Waterproof RV653BTLD Series coaxial speakers are designed with an integrated Bluetooth amp and audio-driven LED show. The onboard 120-watt Bluetooth amp means no additional amp source is needed. Paired phones/tablets/laptops control volume and the audio-driven LED show. Available in white or black. Mounting depth 3.5" and 12-14VDC input. For more information, contact the company directly. PQN offers full OEM support.

[www.rvspeakers.net](http://www.rvspeakers.net)

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[balrvproducts.com](http://balrvproducts.com)

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# Parts Customers: Lure Them In

*Merchandising marine products in RV parts departments isn't so difficult if the right steps are taken.*



**By Linda Cahan**

Linda Cahan is the president of Portland, Ore.-based Cahan & Co., a consulting firm that works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through creative, affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit [www.lindacahan.com](http://www.lindacahan.com)

**RV** travelers take many paths. Many of those lead to rivers, lakes and coastal areas to soak up the negative ions created by the waterways that make them feel fully alive and happy. Among these are also sun-seekers leaving cold climates for warmth.

Marine stores have built-in customers whose passion centers around the water and sun. There is a built-in crossover opportunity for RV stores to bring in some marine-related products. And for the sun-seekers, solar is taking off in a big way as an add-on for many RVers.

If you've been selling and or servicing RVs for a while now, you probably have a core group of customers who come back for service, chemicals, accessories and parts. Hopefully you've developed friendly relationships with many of these people and have a sense of their travel interests. Think about doing a little market study and simply ask them if they travel to lakes and saltwater locations and if they would be interested in having fishing and marine accessories available to them at your RV store.

I visited West Marine in Tigard, Ore., to learn more about the crossover merchandise between marine and RV customers. I was instantly impressed.

The store was neat, very well-merchandised, the lighting was good and there was obvious care taken on the endcaps and gondolas to create an easy-to-shop customer experience. All the products were turned with their labels forward, prices all in the same place, and if there were empty spaces, duplicates were brought up to the shelf fronts to fill in supply chain gaps.

Derek Shaw, the store manager, was greatly helpful. His team focuses on knowledge of the industry combined with conscious visual merchandising. Shaw sees a lot of RV people who come in for marine-grade electrical wire, paint, adhesives and electronics – all things that will stand up far better to salty air than many of the more generic products found in an RV store.

## Steps to Consider

Consider offering your customers these better quality and performing products for their trips to the coasts and the few inland saltwater locations in the U.S.A.: the Great Salt Lake, Soda Lake in Washington state, Walker Lake in Nevada, and the Pecos River in Texas and New Mexico.

You may be wondering how on earth you're going to fit this new stuff onto your potentially already crowded fixtures and how to differentiate it from the regular RV products. Thanks to some supply chain issues, you may have some extra space on your walls and gondolas. If not, consider that these items are pricier with a decent profit margin and will differentiate your store from others in the area.

There are two ways you can comfortably and successfully add these categories.

Possibility one: Time-intensive but visually powerful. Let people know that all the merchandise in this one hanging and shelved section is marine-grade product. You can hire a professional painter to paint the wall or gondola a blue tone.

You always want contrast with your merchandise and labels. If the merchandise has darker labels, use a lighter, brighter blue. If the labels are light, a darker blue will work well. Make sure the paint is a satin or a semi-gloss finish.

Once painted, add a sign to the top that either spans the entire blue space or is centered on top. This sign would be best if it has white letters on a blue background. Any sign maker can do this for you. The blue can be in the same family as the wall – just think of a paint strip from a hardware or paint store.

It often shows the same blue from light to dark shades. Bring your blue fixture paint to the sign maker and have them find a compatible (but not the same) blue for the sign. This will grant these products instant visibility and sales.

For the DIY person: Use masking tape, newsprint, or plastic sheeting, and with your doors open, prep the area on the gondola or wall you



*“Education is a huge part of selling a new category. Make sure your staff understands the reasons why a customer may prefer or need marine-grade paint, epoxy, wire, and so on. Explain the virtues and ease of having solar energy.”*



want to paint blue. Thoroughly cover all the nearby merchandise, as well as the floor. Remember, a good paint job is 80 percent prep and 20 percent paint.

Lightly sand the wall or metal gondola first and pick up all the paint dust with a slightly damp rag. Whether you spray or use a fine, wide brush, try to find a low VOC paint so your store isn't toxic or smell that way.

Possibility two: Easier. Get stick-on labels printed that can go on the front of each piece of marine-grade product that simply says “Marine Grade” or something else that accurately differentiates it from regular merchandise.

Merge the marine goods in with the regular products within each category. For example, electrical wire by the foot would be

merchandised next to regular RV wire – but would have a (larger) sticker saying, “Marine Grade”. This will explain the increased cost. At least it should. There's always that one customer ... as you well know.

### Successfully Selling Crossover Products

Another big crossover seller is the blow-up paddle board category. Co-sales are electric pumps. While a hand/foot powered pump is only \$20, most customers will come back and buy the \$99 electric pumps after dealing with pumping by hand more than once. Kayaks sell as well but attaching them to an RV has some more technical challenges.

I asked Shaw, the store manager for West Marine, about fishing



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#### AVAILABLE IN:

Diamond Plated

\*Not available for Multi-Axle Tyre Gards

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**With just a bit of organization, it's possible to successfully integrate aftermarket products for boats into an RV parts showroom.**

rod sales to RVers. He said that most people bought their equipment at or near the location where they were planning to fish, as rods, reels, lures and line are very site-specific.

However, the dealership sells more generic fishing equipment that can unscrew and become far easier to store in a small place. People often buy that and then shop locally at their fishing place for the smaller accessories for that specific locale and type of fish.

The two Curtis Trailers stores in the Portland, Ore., area specialize in fifth wheels. A fairly new and very strong seller has been solar panels. Angela Pettit, a sales associate at the Beaverton, Ore., Curtis Trailers store told me that solar panels are being added frequently to new and existing units.

In the Pacific Northwest, boondocking – dry camping with no power – is very popular. Adding two 200-watt solar panels will keep the batteries charged. Pettit suggested I get in touch with Dan Schneider, her sales manager, as “he is the true solar expert” at the dealership.

Schneider gave me more specific merchandising information about the solar panels and lithium batteries. The actual large panels take up too much on-floor space. Most often, they are shown on actual RVs that are for sale outside.

There also is a catalog handy to show customers solar options. The selection of batteries is most often on shelves, or in the case of NTP-STAG products – on their vendor rack. A solar category that can be stocked on shelves are the fold-up solar panels. They fold together and apart like a suitcase and are put on the ground next to a RV.

### **Product Education is Key**

Education is a huge part of selling a new category. Make sure your staff understands the reasons why a customer may prefer or need marine-grade paint, epoxy, wire and so on. Explain the virtues and ease of having solar energy.

If you carry kayaks, blow-up paddle boards, or fishing rods and tackle, it's important that parts representatives can talk about their product features and benefits.

Knowledge is power and once they understand the benefits, based on their travel plans, you'll have a grateful customer. **RV**